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Anne Lange
Chief, State-Federal Fisheries Division
Office of Sustainable Fisheries
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway, Room 13317
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

VIA FACSIMILE (301) 713-0596

Dear Ms. Lange:

The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) is a national, grassroots political action organization representing individual sport fishermen and the sport fishing industry. As a member of the RFA, I respectfully urge NMFS to keep the EEZ closed to striped bass fishing.

First, NMFS must address the commercial bycatch of striped bass that is already occurring in the EEZ before opening these waters to directed fisheries. Extensive coastal migrations of striped bass occur annually in the Mid-Atlantic EEZ and many of these fish are large breeders. During these migrations, large numbers of bass are particularly vulnerable to commercial nets. On the water observations have shown that there is already a significant amount of striped bass mortality in the EEZ due to commercial bycatch. It would not be appropriate to remove the moratorium until this is addressed.

Second, as Amendment 6 states, there are concerns about the relative lack of larger fish in the stock. Lifting the moratorium would place an increased pressure on the stock of older, larger fish, which Amendment 6 seeks to enhance. Thus, the long-term sustainability of the stock would be threatened.

Furthermore, an open harvest of striped bass in the EEZ could cause the fishing mortality rate to exceed the targets set in Amendment 6. Increased effort and landings in the EEZ could then result in more restrictive management measures for recreational fishermen such as higher minimum size limits, reduced bag limits, and shorter seasons which would surely add up to lost opportunities for the recreational fishing sector.

Striped bass are far too valuable to the recreational fishing sector and coastal communities to be compromised by opening the EEZ at this time. I strongly urge NMFS to continue the striped bass harvest moratorium in the EEZ.

Sincerely,

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